

PAGE 9-A

Ex-CIA men talked about contacting Soviet agents

By Bill Gertz
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A former CIA agent who first revealed the espionage activities of CIA defector Edward Lee Howard discussed with Howard a plan to contact Soviet agents in Mexico City, according to a forthcoming published report.

Former CIA officer William G. Bosch remains a "key figure" in the case, says an article scheduled for publication in Sunday's editions of The New York Times Magazine.

Mr. Bosch told FBI agents of a July 1985 meeting he had with Howard at South Padre Island, Texas, in which Howard admitted to spying for the Soviets, the article says.

Howard, who by then had been charged with spying for the Soviet Union, turned up on Aug. 7 this year in Moscow, where had been granted political asylum. A former CIA case officer, he was fired by the agency in 1983 for what intelligence officials say was petty theft and illegal drug use disclosed in two separate lie-detector tests.

"Bosch, too, had gotten into trouble with the CIA after questions had been raised about alleged currency transactions in South America, according to intelligence officials," the Times report says. "According to the intelligence officials, the two ex-CIA officers discussed taking a trip to the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City, a trip that Bosch said did not take place."

FBI counterintelligence agents spent four days questioning Mr. Bosch in September 1985, shortly before Howard eluded FBI surveillance agents staked out in Howard's residential Santa Fe, N.M., neighborhood, the report says.

Information from the interrogation was delayed in reaching Washington, causing a time lapse that allowed Howard to escape, the report says.

Mr. Bosch, a CIA administrator who had been transferred to the operations section, met Howard in January 1981 while the two men were part of the Directorate of Operations, the CIA's espionage branch, the article says.

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A CIA spokesman declined to comment on the Times report.

Mr. Bosch has not been charged in the case. Repeated phone calls to his Laguna Beach, Calif., residence yesterday were unanswered.

The Times Magazine report also says Mary Howard, Howard's wife, turned down a request from her husband that she and the couple's 3-year-old son, Lee, join the defector in Moscow, the report states.

Mrs. Howard denied any knowledge of Howard's alleged spying, the magazine says. But in the Times Magazine article, Mrs. Howard says she had worked for the CIA and that the couple had been scheduled to go to the CIA's Moscow station.

She told the magazine that her husband suffered from a drinking problem.

An FBI affidavit in the case says Howard met with Soviet KGB intelligence officials in Austria and had been in St. Anton, Austria, on Sept. 20, 1984.

Mrs. Howard, however, said she and her husband had an argument in St. Anton on that date, and that he drove off and was only gone "perhaps 10 or 15 minutes," according to the Times. The couple visited Europe again in early 1985, the magazine says.

Howard is the first current or former CIA official to defect to the Soviet Union in the agency's 39-year history.

He is suspected of disclosing some of the CIA's most sensitive secrets about operations in Moscow, according to U.S. intelligence sources. One source said Howard "wiped out" the CIA's Moscow station, considered the most prestigious post in the CIA's ultra-secret clandestine services branch.

Intelligence sources said Howard provided the Soviets with the identity of a valuable CIA contact in Moscow — research engineer Adolf G. Tolkachev, who the Soviets claim was executed for spying.